Prophet Sulaymān: An Analytical Study of Biblical Literature and the Qur'an

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ABSTRACT:
The Bible and the Qur'an are both replete with historical narratives related to previous nations, groups, individuals, and prophets. Both the sources have described, among others, Prophet Sulaymān from various angles. These descriptions of Prophet Sulaymān in the two great Scriptures are not similar everywhere. There are dissimilarities too. What are the similarities and dissimilarities between Biblical descriptions of Prophet Solomon and Qur'anic descriptions of Prophet Sulaymān? This question has been addressed in the present paper with critical overtones.

Introduction:

Prophet Solomon genealogy was Solomon b. David [1] b. Jesse b. 'Awīd b. 'Aābir b. Sālmūn b. Nāhshūn b. Amīnādāb b. 'Imrān b. Ḥaṣrūn b. Fārs b. Judāh b. Jacob b. Isaac bin Abraham.[2] His father Prophet David once gathered his sons in the presence of scholars and tribal chiefs and declared by God's command Solomon as a prophet and his heir to the throne.[3] Prophet David died and Solomon was made a king at the age of thirteen. His kingdom expanded in the east to Euphrates river, in the west to Egypt, and in the south to the limits of the Yemen.[4] The present article discusses Prophet Solomon, his kingdom, knowledge, miracles

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and his relations with the Queen of Saba as described in the Bible and the *Qur'ān*. It also deals with the similarities and differences in the Divine narration of Prophet Solomon, and the lessons which can be deduced from the story.

Similarities & Differences:

1. In the Bible[5], David called Bathsheba[6], and took an oath by the God of Israel, that Solomon will be the king after him. While the *Qur'ān* says that Solomon inherits David.[7]
2. In the Bible[8] Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than many others. While the *Qur'ān*[9] tells us that God had given him preference over many others.

Knowledge:

Prophet Solomon was gifted with the quality of giving wise decision in complex cases.[10] He was known for his wisdom and justice.

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible[11] and the *Qur'ān*,[12] God gave Solomon wisdom and kingdom which no one would have it after him.
2. In the Bible Prophet Solomon gave the conclusion of his teaching as, "Fear God, and keep His commandments" for this is the whole duty of man. God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil".[13] The teachings of the *Qur'ān* also sound the same.[14]
3. In the Bible[15] Prophet Solomon was given the knowledge of arts and science. The three books of the modern Bible are ascribed to him: the Song, Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Proverbs. It says further, Men of all nations used to come to hear his wisdom[16]. While in the *Qur'ān*[17], Psalms had been ascribed to David.

Solomon's Kingdom:

Prophet Solomon prayed to God for a kingdom the like of which would not be awarded to anyone after him.[18] Almighty God granted his wish[19]. He had gifted Solomon with many abilities. The wind was under his command.[20] He was blessed with understanding of the language of birds,[21] insects,[22] and animals.[23] God directed the Jinn to work for him.[24] Solomon taught them how to mine soil and dig out its minerals to make tools and weapons[25].

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible[26] Solomon asked God for wisdom to understand and judge people, while in the *Qur'ān*, God gave Knowledge to Solomon.[27]
2. In the Bible, Prophet Solomon speaks with animals, birds, reptiles and fishes.[28] While in the *Qur'ān* he knew the language of birds and insects.[29]

Miracles:

Almighty God gave Solomon power over Jinn and Devils. They worked for him as laborers, without disobeying any of his order.[30] Whoever did not obey him used to be punish severely. These Jinn made for him arches, images, basins like large reservoirs and fixed cooking pots.[31] They also made huge pools.[32] Solomon used to marshal with his host of Jinn, men and birds with best order and ranks.[33]

Similarities & Differences

1. The relation between Prophet Solomon and Jinn is not mentioned in Bible. However it is mentioned in rabbinical legends.[34]

Jinn and Solomon:

Jinn were subjugated to Prophet Solomon, to help him in the construction of the Holy Temple- *Baīt al-Muqaddas* (*Masjid al-Aqṣa*). In Jerusalem, on a gigantic rock, Solomon built an enormous temple to worship God[35]. Today this building is known as, "The Dome of the Rock" *(Masjid Qubbat al-Sakhrah)*. After building Jerusalem he prayed to God for three things. To give him wisdom and kingdom no one else has and whoever prays in this mosque should be pure of sins as if he had borne new.[36]

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, Almighty God told Prophet David that Prophet Solomon would be king and he would build the temple[37]. The Holy Bible then said that the temple was for his wives to make sacrifice for the false gods of Moab[38], and Molech.[39]

2. Copper:

Almighty God had gifted Solomon with the molten spring of Copper[40]. He directed him to teach both men and Jinn to extract minerals, and make weapons.[41]

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, Solomon's household articles in the Palace of Lebanon Forest were made of pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in his days. He had a fleet of trading ships manned by Hiram's men. It returned, once every three years, carrying gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons.[42] While the *Qur'ān* says, that God had gifted Solomon with the molten spring of Copper.[43]

Horses:

Prophet Solomon was also a great lover of horses. It constituted an essential part of his army. He was himself a great equestrian.[44] One day some special horses were brought to Solomon. He was reviewing the stable. The horses attracted him so much that he kept on stroking their bodies. The sun was nearly setting, and the time for the middle prayer was about to pass.[45] Suddenly he recognized this, and uttered: "Oh God! Forgive me; I surely love the finer things of life than the service of my Lord."[46]

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horse men, whom he station in the chariot cities with the king at Jerusalem.[47] In another verse Bible says that Solomon had forty thousands stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousands horsemen.[48] While the *Qur'ān* says, Solomon had many horses, which he left all to please God[49] without mentioning their number.

The Wind:

Solomon was a great admirer of horses but when they interrupted his prayer, he decided to forsake them to please his God. Almighty God in reward made the wind subservient to him.[50] It was the fastest means of transportation.[51] He could now cover month's journeys in the morning and a month long journey in the evening.[52] It is also said, that Solomon had a wooden rug. He used to travel to his destiny with the blowing wind rendering different speeds.[53]

Court:

In the Bible Solomon's palace floors were made of sandalwood, inlaid with gold. The throne had six steps; the footstool of gold was attached to it. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom[54].

Similarities & Differences

1. The Qur'ān also mentions that Solomon inherited David. In his court there were Jinn, Birds and Men[55].

Ants:

Once, Prophet Solomon and his army of jinn, men and birds were passing over the valley. They were all set in the battle order[56]. The valley in which he was traveling was full of ants. When they reached there, one of them said, "Ants! Enter your dwellings so that Prophet Solomon and his troops could not crush you unknowingly.[57] Solomon smiled and got amused at her speech. He recalled God's bounties bestowed to him and offered gratitude to Him.[58] He ordered his soldiers to stay still and wait until all the ants crawled away safely[59]. He was thankful that the ant knew him as a prophet who would not intentionally harm God's creation.[60]

Similarities & Differences

1. The story is not mentioned in the Bible.

The Hoopoe:

Once Solomon inspected his courtiers, and found the hoopoe missing.[61] He sent signals all over, to call him, but he was found

nowhere. In anger, he declared, unless the bird had good reason for his absence, he would be killed or punished severely.[62] The hoopoe eventually came to Solomon[63] and explained that he had flown over the land of Saba[64], where he had seen the queen of the Saba state, named as, "Bilqīs". Prophet Solomon was unaware of the existence of such a state but the hoopoe brought this information[65]. She had abundance of wealth, a huge army and a splendid throne[66] made of gold, diamonds and other precious stones.[67] But in spite of all this wealth, Satan had entered in the hearts of the inhabitants of her kingdom who worship the sun.[68]

Similarities & Differences

1. According to Rabbinic literature [69], Prophet Solomon had been given control over all living things. He used to order the living creatures to dance before him. One day, upon finding the hoopoe missing, he summoned him, and the bird told him that he had been searching for somewhere new[70]. The *Qur'ān* also narrates the story of Hoopoe in the same way[71], while Bible remains silent here.

Letter to the Queen:

Prophet Solomon wrote a letter[72] to the queen of Saba, to check the bird's information. He handed over the letter to the bird, and ordered him to convey his message.[73] The bird flew to the land and dropped the letter in the queen's lap.[74] The queen called her advisors to council regarding the matter. She informed them about the letter which had advised her to submit to the true God and abide by His Commandments.[75] The queen sought their counsels, as she did not decide a case without counseling. Some chiefs suggested fighting against the Prophet, whereas the others left the matter for her to decide.[76] The

queen explained the counselors not to embroil her country into war, as it brings wrath and cause destruction to the inhabitants.[77]

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Rabbinic literature the bird went to a land in the east, extremely rich in gold, silver, and plants, whose ruler was the Queen of Saba, and the bird, on its own advice was sent by Solomon to invite the queen's to Solomon's court.[78] The *Qur'ān* also explains it in the same way.[79]
2. In the Rabbinic literature the queen collected together several vessels and with many riches, selecting six thousands boys and girls, and sent them to Solomon with a letter stating that she would visit three years later. When she finally came, Solomon was seated within a glass porch, and the Queen, thinking that the king was sitting in water, lifted her dress, which amused Solomon. [80]

Gifts:

The queen however prefers to send him gifts[81] to see his reaction. She sends many precious gifts including slaves and pearls.[82] When they reached there, the envoys of the queen realized that their riches were negligible in comparison to the kingdom of Solomon. They left the gifts to Solomon. He did not even ask to open the covers and was annoyed at the delivery of the presents[83]. He returned them with harsh words and told the messenger, that "God has given him much better than all these riches". Solomon also informed her that he would soon march with a huge army to conquer the land[84].

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, the queen of Saba heard the fame of Solomon. She came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. Solomon

answered all her questions[85]. While the *Qur'ān* also explains her arrival towards Solomon without mentioning the questions.[86]

2. In the Bible, the queen brought with her a great caravan of camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones.[87] While the *Qur'ān* explains, the queen sends him the gifts to see his reaction.

Palace of Glass:

The envoy went back to the queen and told her what they saw and heard from Solomon. The queen decided to surrender herself to Solomon.[88] She left her country to meet him.[89] She was also accompanied by her royal officials and servants. She sent a messenger ahead to inform Solomon about her arrival. When Solomon heard about the queen's arrival, he made an *Al-ṣarh,*[90] a glass surface with water underneath it, for the queen[91]. The entire floor looked like a pool of water.[92] The queen was told to enter the palace. Thinking it as a pool, she tucked up her skirt, showing uncovered legs.[93]

Similarities & Differences:

1. According to Rabbinic literature, when the queen of Saba arrived Prophet Solomon was seated within a glass hall, and the Queen, thinking that the king was sitting in water, lifted her dress, making Solomon to smile.[94] The text is similar to the *Qur'ān*.

The Throne:

Solomon wished to show the queen of Saba another miracle. He asked the Jinn to bring her throne.[95] *ᶜifrīt*, the strongest Jinn, offered to bring the throne in a time, less than, when Solomon would rise from his place. But other Jinn offered he will bring it, in the blinking of an eye.[96] The

Jinn obeyed immediately[97]. When Prophet Solomon saw the throne before him, he praised God and thanked Him for His favors[98]. He ordered the ornament of that throne to be changed, so that it could be distinguished for her test whether she could recognize it or not.[99] When the queen arrived, she was astonished to see her throne because on one hand its pearls were changed and on the other hand she left it on her land.[100] Solomon asked, "Is this your throne"? And the queen replied it looks the same. [101]

The Queen Embraced:

The queen after seeing her throne realized the powers, God had given to Solomon. His seat was in Palestine, and the throne of the queen had been in the Yemen, two thousand miles away. Till now, she had observed many signs which were enough to make her realize that Solomon was a prophet and his call was true.[102] She told Solomon that she submit, together with him to one true God.[103]

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, the queen was overwhelmed with Prophet Solomon's wisdom, the palace he built, the food on his table, his officials seating and the offering he made at the temple of Lord.[104] The *Qur'ān* also says that the queen was impressed by Solomon.[105]
2. In the Bible, the queen of Saba said to Prophet Solomon! All Praise is to the Lord, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the LORD.[106] The *Qur'an* also says that the queen accepted her faith in one true God.[107]

Marriage:

Solomon then married queen Saba. He kept her as the queen of Yemen and sent her back to the land. He used to visit her once in month and stay

with her for three days[108]. He also commanded the jinn to built three palaces in Yemen, which were called *Ghamdān, Sālihīn*, and *Beitun*[109] The people of Saba, who worshiped the heavenly bodies, were converted to believe in One God[110].

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible Prophet Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray,[111] The *Qur'ān* does not support it. Islamic traditions however say it in the way that one night Solomon went to one hundred women, to give birth to a knight who will fight in Gods Cause, but he forgot to say, 'God willing.' Therefore one of those women conceived and gave birth to a half-man.[112]
2. In the Bible Solomon did not follow the Lord completely, as his father David had done.[113] Solomon was warned that his wives would lead him to idolatry.[114] While in the *Qur'ān*, God praised him among the righteous[115].

Death:[116]

Prophet Solomon died in Jerusalem and was buried there 923 years before the commencement of the Christians Calendars[117]. He lived amidst glory. All creatures were subjected to him.[118] His life and death was full of wonders and miracles. David having laid the foundation of the temple of Jerusalem left it to be finished by his son, Solomon, who entrusted it to Jinn[119]. They used to work only under his supervision.[120] One day, Prophet Solomon with the rod in his hand, was watching the kingdom under him, when he saw a young man coming towards him, He enquired, "Who are you and who gave you permission to enter the palace?" The man replied, "I have arrived with the permission of God,

the Owner of the universe. I am the angel of death and God has sent me to take away your life".[121] Solomon said, "Discharge your duty". He stood before Jinn leaning on his staff, his soul departed his body. His body remained standing for a long time. The jinn have believed him to be alive.[122] They continued their work, until the construction completed. God then sent the little worm of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his staff. [123] His body fell to the ground. The Jinn saw plainly that if they had known the unseen, they would not humiliate themselves.[124] Prophet Solomon ruled for forty years and died at the age of fifty-three[125].

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, Prophet Solomon reigned over Israel for forty years. He was buried in the city of David. Jeroboam his son succeeded him as a king.[126] It is not mentioned in the *Qur'ān*.
2. In the Bible, due to Solomon heritage from David and his wisdom, he fell away from God in his later life and lived a life full of sin. As a result, when Solomon died, the kingdom disintegrated into several parts.[127] While *Qur'ān* depicts him as a righteous Prophet[128].

Legacy of son:

Once two women were going with there sons. A wolf attacked and took away the son of one of them. They accused each other so they took their case to Prophet David, and he decided in favor of the older woman. Then both of them went to Solomon, he said: Bring me a knife and I will cut this boy into two pieces, a half for each of you. The younger woman said no he is not my son. Prophet Solomon gave the verdict in favor of the younger woman.[129]

Similarities & Differences

1. In the Bible, the woman who had filed suit could not bear to see her child killed. In a panic she immediately withdrew the suit, asking the king to judge in favor of her opponent, but spare the child's life. The defendant, more interested in winning than in the child's welfare, argued "I like the king's decision cut him in two!"[130] The *Qur'ān* doesn't explain the story, while Islamic traditions support the story.[131]

Outline Lessons and Conclusion:

Prophet Solomon was a King, known for his wisdom. He built the temple in Jerusalem. He inherited both his father's kingdom and his spiritual insight and prophetic office[132]. He was gifted with the knowledge of visible and invisible living beings. God enabled him to understand bird's communication. Saba was a rich country where people worshipped the sun. Prophet Solomon impressed the Queen of Saba with his personality, knowledge, wisdom and his glorious kingdom. He converted the Queen to believe in, "One true God".[133] The *Qur'ān* story of Prophet Solomon teaches the lessons that:

1. Knowledge is a true power of man, as when Prophet Solomon joined knowledge, among wealth, kingdom and knowledge, he automatically received all the three.
2. Remember God always, as Prophet Solomon was successful for he always remembered Him.
3. Take good care of all the living beings even of ants.
4. There are invisible characters (Jinn).
5. Jinn are also powerless and they do not know everything, as they were unable to know that Prophet Solomon was alive or dead.

6. There are certain procedures after which we can control demons and Jinn.
7. Wind can be subjugated, with God's will.
8. Almighty God always reply to the sacrifice as when Prophet Solomon left Horses, for being a cause of delay in prayers, God made the wind subservient to him.
9. An indication that language is a tool of information, Prophet Solomon knew the languages of all animals and birds, and thus we should learn diverse languages to attain knowledge.
10. Our ultimate goal should be to preach unity of God and His Message, as Prophet Solomon invited Queen Saba towards religion and rejected the gifts.
11. Preach religion intellectually with practical examples, as the arrangement of glass, its resemblance to the lake to prove the failure of sense knowledge was an intelligent idea.
12. Supreme love is always reserve for Almighty God.

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